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POEMS OF THE METROPOLIS

HOWARD WISWALL BIBLE

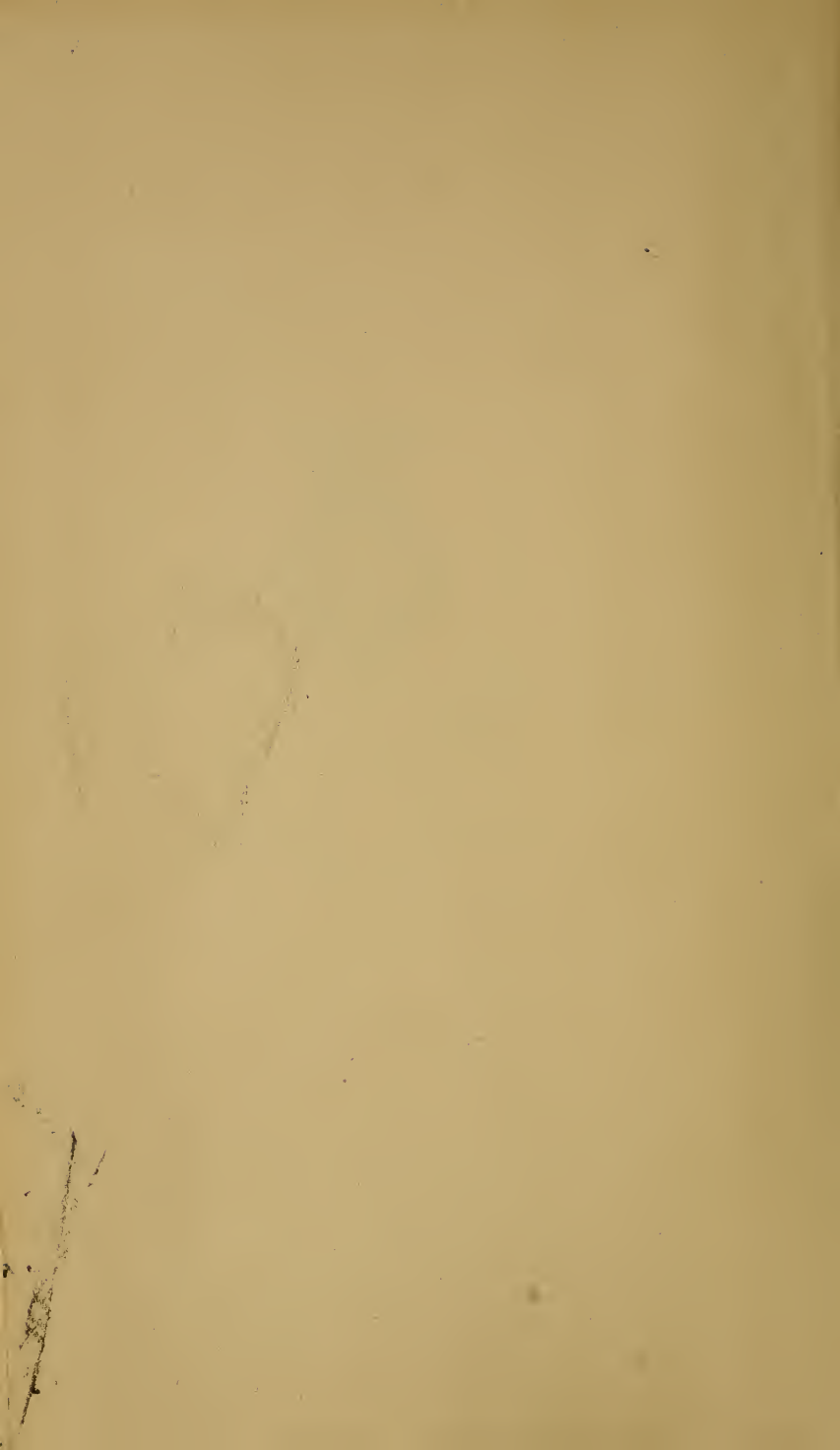


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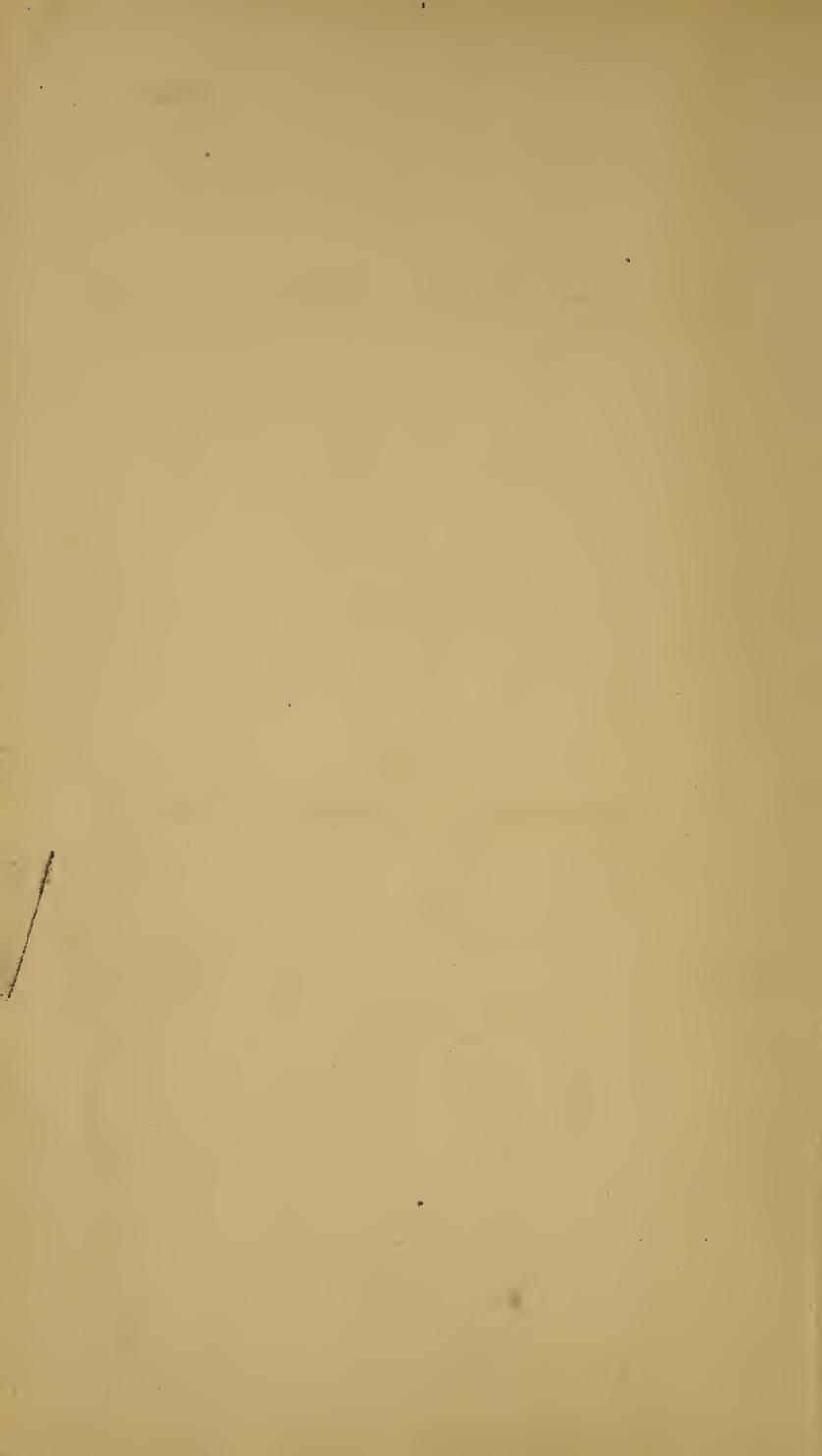
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POEMS OF THE METROPOLIS



Poems of the Metropolis

by
Howard Wiswall Bible



WASHINGTON
BREWOOD
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1916

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HOWARD WISWALL BIBLE
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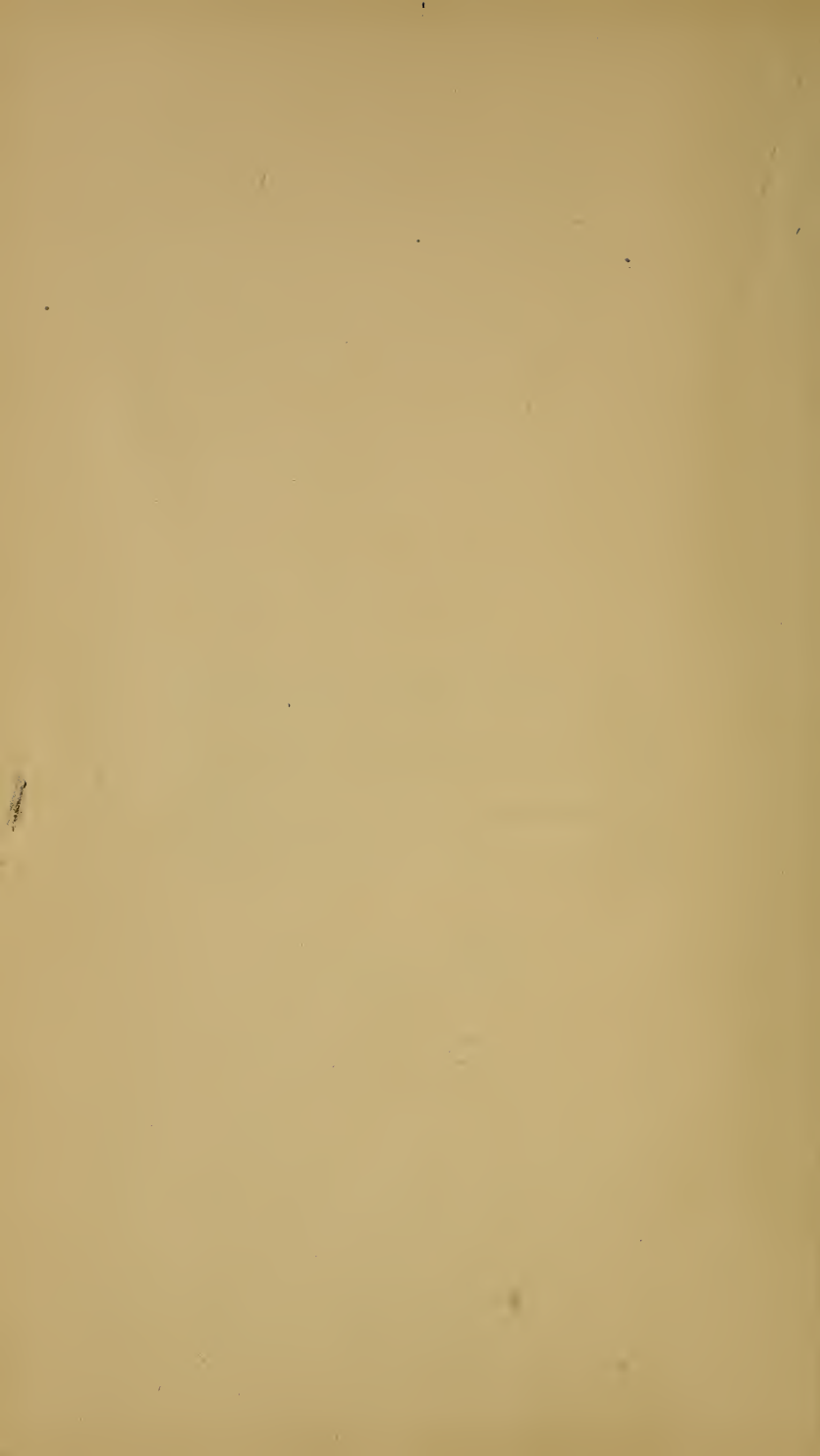
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May 22, 1861

The verses contained in this small book, represent some thoughts, observations, and impressions of an ardent New Yorker, who has felt the pulse of the every day life of the Metropolis, with its heroism and tragedy.



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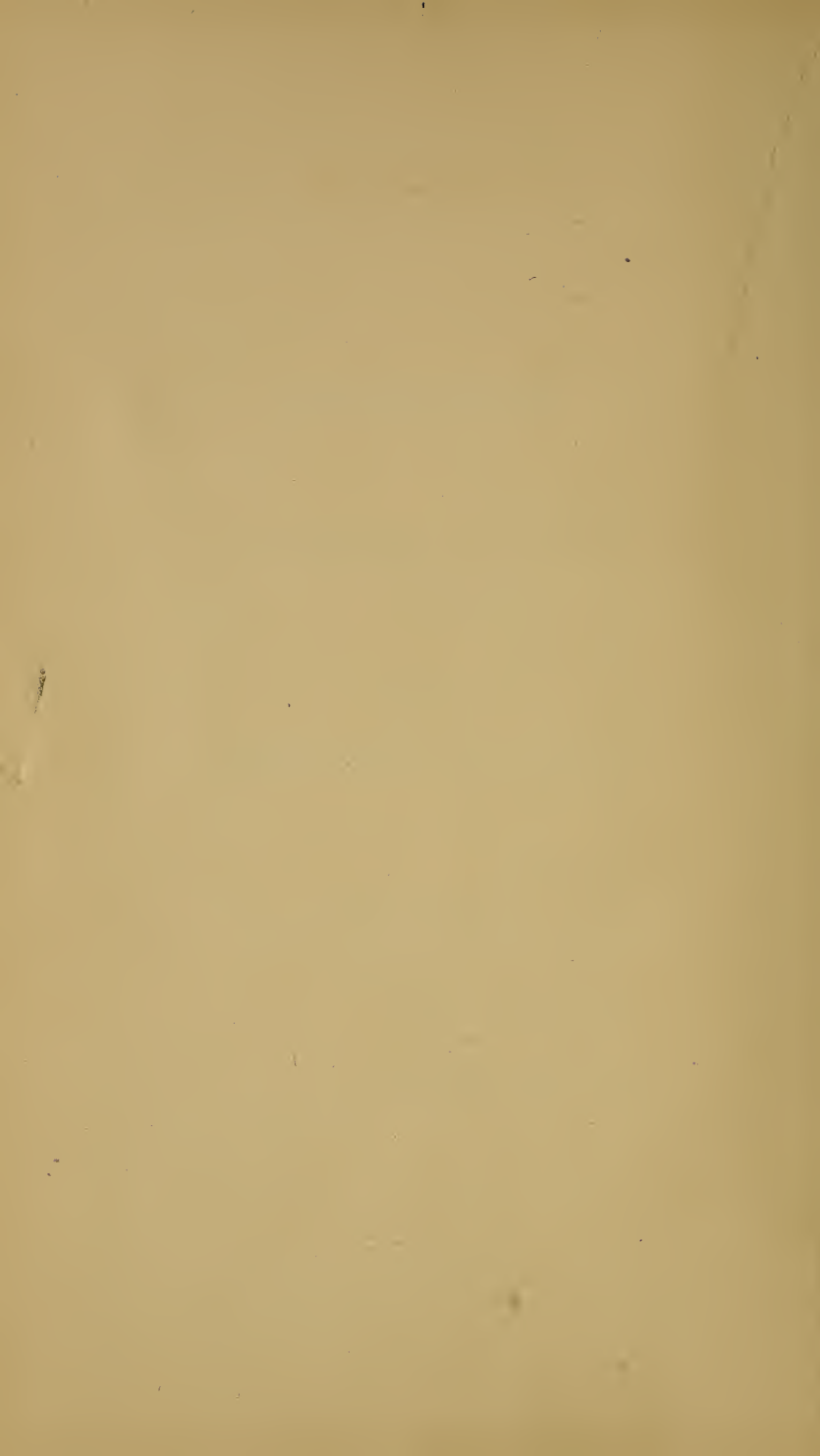
HIS RIBBON

THE WASH OF THE TIDES

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Creagan's Dan

The brave may come and the brave may go,
Like suns of Summer and Winter's snow,
But never, never in all man's span
Will breathe the soul of a braver man
Than Dan—just Creagan's Dan!

We knew him first as a freckled kid,
A clumsy fellow who tried and did;
The chief said, "Make him a ladderman,"
And so with the grey horse truck he ran,
Red Dan—Brick Creagan's Dan!

Yes, redder than blazes was his hair,
And devil alone could match the dare,
That spurred him when an alarm began,
To gallop aheel of th' gray horse span,
With Dan—Mike Creagan's Dan!

I have seen him scale 'em sill to sill,
Just like an Italian's monkey will,
This foreign sprig of an Irish clan,
The kind that breed a good fighting man,
Like Dan—Boss Creagan's Dan!

His last ride came a December night,
'Twas four alarms and a wind swept fight;
We raced with the clanging caravan
That carried the crews to their last man,
And Dan—Big Creagan's Dan!

With all of a city's block ablaze
And towers and hose in hopeless maze;
A cry was repeated man to man,
That three lives rested on red-haired Dan:
Our Dan—and Creagan's Dan!

He was sole hope of a squad cut off,
Stranded with death in a fired loft!
Over the alley a ladderman,
Higher than ever the blazes ran,
 Stood Dan—Proud Creagan's Dan!

Then crawling along the icy snow,
With the street two hundred feet below,
A desp-rate clutch on the coping span,
That narrowed in like a closing fan,
 Crept Dan—Poor Creagan's Dan!

He braced himself on a window ledge
And he hooked his scaler to the edge,
Where racing death with his comrades ran,
Holding his nerve like a brave man can;
 Did Dan—Old Creagan's Dan!

One arm was part of the slender stick,
And it took muscle to do the trick,
Of swinging men all bigger than Dan:
All brawny types of the fireman,
 Like Dan—Boss Creagan's Dan!

When last of three grasped the welcome sill,
To turn to Dan with a hearty will,
The poor lad slipped where the cold stone ran,
And swung away like a hanging man,
 Brave Dan—Big Creagan's Dan!

Spent with his effort, broken and bruised,
He held the scaler a hero used;
He had changed places beneath the ban
And our brave mate was a fore-doomed man,
 Our Dan—and Creagan's Dan!

Suspended there in the fitful glare,
Wrapt in the smoke of the rising flare,
His last words spoken to Donavan
Were: "Tell him, Pat, that I died a man,"
 His Dan—Dad Creagan's Dan!

Whatever the Force May Do

I've twenty years to my credit, sir,
And I tramped them one and all;
For twenty years I have walked a beat,
Alert to my duties call.

A charge you say is against me, sir?
You're right, I have had a few,
For charges will lay against the force,
Whatever the force may do.

Yes! yes! for taking a drink, you say,
In the winter of nineteen-three—
A night as cold as the Pole up North,
A night when a chill got me!

I lost a whole week's pay for that drink,
My record received a blot;
I caught a burglar the foll'wing day
But hell was the thanks I got!

They nailed me, too, when I fanned a bat,
Who cost me a tooth or two;
I stopped a horse and was dragged a block,
And they said: "Three days will do."

You're right! "An apple from off a cart,"
When a Greek refused the pay;
Yes, that was another charge they brought,
It cost me another day.

"Asleep in a doorway standing up!"
The drivers were all at war;
An hour's sleep out of forty-eight—
I needed a dozen more!

The fire down in Macdougall Street—
Tenements all ablaze!
Remember the chance that I got then?
Some said it would bring a raise.

But they said, "he was asleep on post,"
And they looked the record through;
So I continued to walk my beat,
Like many another 'll do.

Oh yes, the chevrons once caught my eye,
I dreamed of a captain's shield;
But where comes the man without the coin
When bucking the money field?

A pension? Yes, if you are in luck,
And a whole life lost if not.
Take Casey, who served his twenty years;
Dismissal was all he got.

A charge you see was against him, sir,
What matter if false or true,
When charges will lay against the force
Whatever the force may do!

October, 1912.



The Water Front

Along the water front by night
There runs an old horse car,
With tinkling bell and oil-lamp light
And frequent jolt and jar.
Beside the piers in silence deep,
Past haunts of sailormen,
You yet may see that horse car creep
The same as we did then.

How diff'rent once the way we passed,
How diff'rent once the docks:
Remember how the ships once massed
Their spars and ropes and blocks?
That was a day when clippers showed
Their towers to the sky—
When countless masts were fairly bowed,
Where we rode slowly by.

Once ships, full rigged from China seas,
And barks that braved the Horn;
And brigantines from far Indies,
Whose sails all ports had worn;
Had sailed and sailed to sail again—
To harbor in our land,
From 'cross the stormy wind-kissed main,
Within our Hook of Sand.

But then as we went gliding on,
Whilst darkness wrapt the night
In closer embrace 'ere the dawn,
We met a diff'rent sight.
No graceful tops and trim white spars—
No myriad mass of ropes;
Just grim dark stacks, that banish tars
And slay the sailor's hopes.

Once sun-browned seamen strolled the ways,
Men from the world's far parts,
Who tossed the waves for countless days
In ships and brigs and barks,

Now pale mechanics fill the crew,
With stokers grimy black—
The kind who speed a liner through
A narrow ocean track.

Where now the tar who turns his quid
And faces wintry gales,
Who now may do the things he did
When bravely reefing sails?
Who gives the colors of the sea
Along the water way—
The sights of what once used to be
When mariners held sway?

Why wonder that we sighed that night—
Why think we lagged behind:
We were but marking time in flight,
But peeping through the blind.
The sailor seemed to us to be,
Like to the old horse car,
A sight that now and then we see,
But soon shall see no more.

September, 1912.



The Pilot

*He never steers through the channel way
Where the muddy depths may lure,
He never answers the tidal day,
Nor bows to the foghorn's mighty bray.
For his path is steel and sure.*

He waves a flag from a horse's back,
And the flag he waves is red.
He rides alone on a railroad track,
Between the steels is his only tack,
Where the whirling wheels have sped.

They call him pilot and name him true,
Yet he guides no ship to port;
His duty lies where a train runs through,
To clear the tracks and he does it too,
Since the law ordains he ought.

By dark his flag is a lantern's glare,
For a danger lamp he swings—
A lamp reflecting a reddened flare
To carry truckmen a warning where
The way of the horseman flings.

He is a lad of the far West Side,
Of the streets and docks and piers:
He and the horse he is paid to ride
Are passing sights of the city wide,
For a changing time now nears.

*He never steers through the channel way
Where the muddy depths may lure.
He never answers the tidal day,
Nor bows to the foghorn's mighty bray,
For his path is steel and sure.*

November, 1912.

The Sin of Poverty

You ask me for a story lad,
To while away your time;
Some laugh-begotten tale, or mad
Escape, else lover's rhyme.

But I will tell a tale of years—
Of age that claims us all.
Instead of laugh I'll win your tears
By pity's saddest call.

My tale tells of the city's streets,
Of mis'ry housed with vice—
Of what the passer often meets,
Of life and its high price.

She was a woman old and bent,
Of four score years or more,
Yet held behind a barred casement,
An iron bolted door.

I saw her in the drear Night Court
And scarcely heard her speak;
She, whom the hand of age had caught—
A woman old and weak.

I thought of God—I thought of man,
And shuddered at the sin
That ushered age beneath the ban—
The crime that brought her in.

Around the room a murmur rose,
Then quiet fell on all,
Whilst in her poor and ragged clothes
She answered justice' call.

So feeble were the words she voiced—
So bent the aged head,
That every eye about was moist
And silent tears were shed.

*She was a woman without wage,
No use to you nor me;
She had committed the crime of age—
The sin of poverty.*

"Why," said the judge, "bring her to me?"
The officer replied:
"I found her asking alms," said he,
"The law she thus defied."

Never a word in her defense
Was heard in that still room;
She, who but asked a few stray pence,
Awaited th' criminal's doom.

The Court looked down, the pris'ner, too,
Her eyes were t'ward the grave;
"So," said the judge, "the charge is true!"
And then her sentence gave.

"Six months!" unto her eighty years
In pens where vice is fed—
"Six months" when death so swiftly nears;
Two words were all he said.

Then, guided by the arm of law,
Supported by the just,
They led her into jail once more,
For justice said they must.

Thou God, if God a mortal sees,
Proclaim Thy truth to me:
Tell why was she, on tott'ring knees,
Fore-damned by poverty?

Tell why some men, and women, too,
Are fed and clothed so well,
Whilst others with whom life is through
Are made to die in hell?

Tell why this woman, poor and cold,
Who craved a simple mite,
Should be so cursed for being old—
For asking what was right?

*She was a woman without wage,
No use to you nor me;
She had committed the crime of age—
The sin of poverty.*

My Daughter Is of the Street

*Only an East Side Jewish maid,
Who heeded a youthful vow;
Only a woman underpaid,
By life of the here and now.*

Facing the courtroom cold and drear,
Defending her ancient right;
Grasped by the toils of mortal fear,
Alone in the Court of Night.

"Who comes to charge this woman?" cried
The judge from his lofty seat;
The one who bore her then replied:
"My daughter is of the street."

She shared a bed without a bond,
A sinner of love was she;
Trusting to nature's magic wand—
The god of eternity.

Bowed in her anguish, wrapt in grief,
The girl from the Ghetto sobbed;
Called to the bar like th' common thief—
Like one who had killed, and robbed.

Pity had fled from th' mother's heart,
The judge was as cold as steel;
None in the crowded justice mart
Arose to the pris'ner's weal.

None of the "sharks" who prey by law
And none of the so-called just;
She was a woman, nothing more,
Befouled by the streets of lust.

"Mother, what sentence do you ask,
What shall the penalty be?"
Her eyes were dry to th' tearful task,
So, "send her away!" said she.

Start her upon the path below,
Where the underworld hath trod,
For she shall reap where she doth sow
And answer to man—not God.

*Only an East Side Jewish maid,
Who heeded a youthful vow;
Only a woman underpaid
By life of the here and now.*

"The Sin of Poverty" and "My Daughter is of the Street" are founded on actual incidents that transpired in the Jefferson Market Night Court during the month of September, 1912.



The Freighter

Have you watched them make up the freight,
And sort out the cars on the tracks;
The workers of early and late,
The carrier's load on their backs?

With the grind of brakes and release,
They harness their steed to the load;
Then settle inside of the beast,
To feed with a fiery goad.

And out through the maze of green lights,
The markings of ways that are clear,
They start on their nocturnal flights,
With twinkling red lights in the rear.

And they run through lands in the dark,
And shriek at the crossings and towns,
A belching the furnace fed spark,
To light up the woodlands and downs.

And the world, asleep or awake,
Is debtor to crews of the rail,
For journeys they take and retake,
On tracks of the iron-bound trial.

So hail them, you city-bred men,
Forgive them the clangor they raise,
For their's is an uncertain ken,
Devoid of the measure of praise!

June, 1914.

His Ribbon

His hair was grey and over thin,
His cheek bones topped a grisseled chin,
His form was bowed, his head was bent,
Men thought his energy all spent.

He'd seldom speak—he'd never talk,
All that he'd do was walk and walk.
He came to you, he came to me
And fetched and carried like the sea.

One summer day he answered me—
Almost all in, as I could see.
He sat awhile,—I urged him to ;
Then talked as none had heard him do.

"My back has known three garbs,," said he,
"Of honor and disgrace to me."
He showed a ribbon in his coat,
While painful spasms gripped his throat.

"These shreds of silk, so nearly gone,
So faded and so badly worn,
For fifty years were all I knew,
That spoke of days when I was true."

"The ribbon came to me by right,
By simple deed one stormy night.
I led a troop of sixty horse,
The finest kind of fighting force."

"A bridge divided foe from foe,
The army had been dealt a blow,
So I rode forth beyond the ridge,
With twenty men to burn the bridge."

Old fires uplit his tired eyes,
Again he rode to that surprise,
Again the night was cold and black
With him astride a charger's back.

He took bypaths—the water's edge;
His spur the soldier's mighty pledge,
His heart was true, his purpose strong;
As he led twenty men along.

"We got within their lines so tight,
It was a heavy cloud-cast night.
I placed the powder on the span
And lit the fuse, and then I ran!"

"But not before the pickets found
The lighted fuse upon the ground;
So backward to the bridge I crept,
And through the tumult quickly leapt!"

"To hurl a fiery pistol shot
Upon the murky powder spot;
Then, with a deaf'ning grinding flash,
I met the river with a splash!"

"I struck out where my troopers stood,
Within the shelter of the wood,
And with a gallop up and away,
I met the chief 'ere break of day!"

"That's how my ribbon came to me,
That was my fairest destiny.
Now learn the dark side of my life:
How I fell victim to its strife."

"A demon's lust for woman came,
The kind that makes all honor tame,
The teasing, tantalizing sort
That are forever bought and bought!"

"She held me 'neath her silken heel,
Beyond my ribbon's noble feel.
For her I fell, for her I slayed,
And with a prison sentence paid!"

"Then I came out to meet the world—
All save my dingy ribbon furled;
I had worn blue, I had worn brown;
I had struck bottom and was down."

"I was hungry and I was cold,
My bones were stiff, I had grown old:
And many times I thought to steal
Until I found my ribbon's feel."

"That's how I am a district boy,
For if you call me I'm a boy!
That's how I tramp as best I can,
In garb of blue that shames the man."

October, 1913.



The Wash of the Tides

A bundle of rags in a paper shield
Alone on a wind-blown seat;
A shivering mortal—the city's yield—
With freezing cold fingers and blood congealed,
Confessing to being beat.

Confessing the sin of the world's great crime,
The sin of the broken life,
He sat in the square in the winter time—
The man who had faltered when years said
"climb!"—
The victim of luckless strife.

A picture of mis'ry and life's despair,
The wash of the tides of gain,
Asleep in the path of the blast sat there,
And never a passer who paused with care,
To answer the sight of pain.

He sat through the storm of the winter's rage,
Alone in the mantled square,
With never a move to ruffle the page,
That shielded his bosom deep bowed with age,
Afar from the paths of care.

He slept through the night, 'neath a sheet of
snow,
Poor waif of the bench and park.
The bundle was there at the dawn's first glow,
The wrappings still rustled both to and fro,
But gone was the human spark!

Yes, gone was the spirit that God gave him,
Its voice cries over the Square;
When winter is here and the lights grow dim
And leaves are all blown from the baréd limb,
When icy white flakes fall there!

Oh! the years will come and the years will go,
 Whilst winds of the winter shriek,
And others shall sit, like the man bent low,
The outcast who fell 'neath the world's hard
 blow,
 Who paused when the world cried "seek!"

And each one shall be as the other one,
 Who died alone in the park,
And each one shall fall, 'ere his race be run ;
And some there shall be who had not begun,
 And all shall die in the dark!

November, 1912.



Knights of the Gong

They may talk of their chariot races of old,
Of the Romans who drove the four horses
 abreast;
And of courage and beauty and pity so cold,
 But the clang and the dash of the city is best!

For the steeds here are limbered to monsters of
 steam,
And all chosen for strength and all chosen for
 speed;
They are able to answer the call for the stream
 To the tops of high buildings, wherever the
 need.

With the shrieking of sirens and hue of the gong,
On the pathway that's cleared by the blue-
 coats on beat,
The great fighters of peace come atearing
 along,
And the horses each one have the winged
 ancient feet!

And the drivers who speed them in reaching the
 fray,
Who are guides through the network of traf-
 fic and rail,
Are the chariot racers of this very day,
 Are the equals of men who have fought in the
 mail!

Yet they wear but a shirt of blue flannel instead,
And are hatless and fearless on dangerous
 calls,
For they know of no shivers of ominous dread,
 When they answer the summons to scale the
 high walls!

To unharness their torrents and combat their foe,
That in baffling smoke and in deepening glare,
Is the hail to the battle where heroes must go;
Is the duty that's calling, to do and to dare.

So you men of to-day and you women so fair,
Let all rise and all drink to the "Knights of
the Gong":
To the men in the ranks of the Army of Dare,
To the chiefs and the crews who go racing
along.

July, 1914.



The Water Tower

Through the hazy pall of night,
Like a serpent to the sight,
Rising, rising stories high,
Piercing pall and piercing sky,
Creeping upward through the smoke,
Higher, higher it doth grope,
Till the flaming embers show
It is striking blow for blow!

Challenging the mighty blaze,
Through the black and crimson haze,
Of the smoke-swept street below,
Hissing, hissing it doth go,
Through the shattered window pane,
Seeking, seeking for the gain,
That doth bring the victory,
O'er the surging fire of sea!

Water foe to kindling flame,
Matching, matching in the game,
By the nozzle spreading spray,
Be it night or be it day,
Bravely led and bravely fed,
Blanketing the roaring red,
Looms the magic water tower,
With its man-directed shower!

May, 1913.

The Iron Worker

*Only an iron worker he,
Who builds for you and builds for me;*

Away up yonder near the sky,
Up where the birds go flying by.
He's brown of cheek and strong of limb,
He works away till day grows dim,
He swings the girders one by one,
He rivets network 'neath the sun;
He catches bolts of molten hue,
And welds them strong and welds them true.

*Only an iron worker he,
Who builds for you and builds for me!*

January, 1914.





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